POLYOMMATUS ICARUS ROTT. (LEP.: LYCAENIDAE) ON TEAN, ISLES OF SCILLY

RUPERT BARRINGTON

101 Egerton Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 8HR.

IN HIS FAMOUS New Naturalist volume, *Butterflies* (1945), E.B. Ford described and illustrated a unique form of *P. icarus* that he found, in 1938, inhabiting the small island of Tean. This island, approximately 0.8km by 0.4km, is one of the 200 or so granite rocks or islands that make up the Isles of Scilly, twenty-five miles to the south-west of Land's End. In this form he noted that the majority of females of the summer brood (there seem to be no recorded observations of the spring brood) were dusted on the upper surface with pale silvery-blue scaling. The undersides of Tean *icarus* frequently exhibited ab. *costajuncta* Courv., and abs. *arcuata* B&L and *basijuncta* B&L were not uncommon. None of these forms are rare on the mainland, but the frequency on Tean was far higher than that usually encountered.

This race is sometimes referred to in the literature and the source is invariably given as Ford. I have not been able to locate any observations of this race other than Ford's. The fact that he was unable to find this form on any other islands in the archipelago that he examined, and that *icarus* is a non-migratory species, was of particular interest as it suggested that the Tean race might be in the process of evolving into a separate subspecies.

I was fortunate to spend a few days in the Scilly Isles in August 1995 and was particularly keen to get onto Tean to examine this race for myself. The weather for my stay was very hot with cloudless skies and the air, swept clean over the Atlantic Ocean, allowed for some spectacular views over the islands and beautifully clear sea. It proved difficult to get a boat out to Tean as all commercial boats operate set tours for visitors to the five large, inhabited Islands. However, I eventually located a boat making a tour of some of the smaller Islands and so, on the morning of 17 August, set out for Tean.

Setting foot on the island where Ford and his colleagues had carried out their ground-breaking ecological studies of *Maniola jurtina* L. (Dowdeswell. 1981), it was immediately obvious that the island flora had since undergone great changes. When he worked there a herd of cattle grazed the island, keeping back the rank growths of bramble and bracken that seem to take over any area on the islands that is not cultivated or grazed. Large areas of grasses were maintained, within which grew the foodplant of *icarus* larvae – *Lotus corniculatus*. The cattle were removed in 1950 and the vegetation has changed disastrously. The island is now dominated by thick bracken and bramble with long coarse grasses around the very perimeter and covering a sandy bar at one end of the island. Despite careful search I was only able to

find four female and six male *icarus*, all of the typical form. The foodplant was very scarce and the habitat looked quite unsuitable for the species.

Dowdeswell (1981) reports that in August 1938 he and Ford estimated the population of *icarus* to be between 450 and 500 adults. They also estimated the population of *M. jurtina* as being about 8650. I saw only small numbers of *jurtina* and the population now must be far below those old records.

Dense growths of bracken and bramble occurred in patches on all the other islands I saw on my visit, but they also contained suitable sites for *icarus*. The species was observed in good numbers on St. Marys, St. Martins, St. Agnes, and St. Helens. On all of these, the female uppersides exhibited the usual shade of blue, and while the aberrations *arcuata, costajuncta* and *basijuncta* were more frequent on St. Marys than I have found them elsewhere (Plate H, Figs. 7-8), the majority of specimens nevertheless exhibited typical undersides. It is perhaps possible that Ford's form of *icarus* might exist on one of the other small, uninhabited islands, but it would be quite an undertaking to make a round trip to investigate this. If it does occur it would probably have had to evolve independently of the Tean race, given the non-migratory nature of the species, and this seems unlikely. It is therefore probable that this unique race has been lost.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to Mr David Wilson for photographing the specimens depicted in Plate H.

References

Dowdeswell, W.H., 1981. *The life of the Meadow Brown*. Heinmann Educational Books, London.

Ford, E.B., 1945. *Butterflies*. The New Naturalist Series, Collins, London.

Some nationally rare Tachinidae (Diptera) from Brent Reservoir including the second British record of *Thecocarcelia acutangulata* (Macquart)

A female *Thecocarcelia acutangulata* was taken while collecting in and around Carr woodland on the East SSSI at Brent Reservoir (TQ2287, VC 21 Middlesex) on 3 October 1994. This is the second British record of this species which is categorised as Vulnerable (RDB 2) by S.J. Falk (1991. A review of the scarce and threatened flies of Great Britain (Part 1). *Research and survey in nature conservation*. **39**: Nature Conservancy Council). The specimen keys clearly to *T. acutangulata* (in Belshaw, R. 1993. Tachinid Flies (Diptera: Tachinidae). *Handbooks for the Identification of British Insects*. **10**: 4a(i). Royal Entomological Society of London) and its identity has subsequently been confirmed by N. Wyatt. It is a medium-sized tachinid fly and the current specimen measures 7.5mm from the base of the antennae to the tip of its abdomen. Critical key characters include the very large